



Image by Banksy (Banksy.co.uk)

## ANT 330C: Theories of Culture & Society

Tuesdays & Thursdays: 12:30-2:00 PM, WCP 4.118

INSTRUCTOR: Jason Cons: WCP 5.138; [jasoncons@utexas.edu](mailto:jasoncons@utexas.edu); 512.232.3832

[Office Hours: Thursday, 2:00-4:00pm or by appointment](#)

TA: Sam Law, [sam.law@utexas.edu](mailto:sam.law@utexas.edu), Tuesdays 2-4 or by appointment

*The problem of leisure, what to do for pleasure?*

—Gang of Four, “Natural’s Not in It,”

This course introduces a set of core ideas and propositions in anthropological theory. To do so, it engages with a highly selective set of thinkers who provide core foundations in contemporary social and anthropological thought. It does this by teaching strategies for thinking with and against, writing about, using, and engaging theoretical texts. The course has two goals. First, it introduces students to the intellectual history of the discipline and a set of thinkers who continue to shape the way that anthropologists think about culture and society. Second, it teaches students how to work with theory—providing tools to not only engage with social theory at large but to use theoretical concepts to better understand the world. Covering a wide range of topics and schools of thought (including, but not limited to, Historical Materialism, Structuralism, Poststructuralism, and Postcolonialism) the course provides a survey of theories of culture and society: focusing on questions such as what does culture do, how does power work, what is the relationship between economy and society, how does colonialism produce the “West,” what is gender, and more. The course is conceived primarily for majors but also for students who are committed to working with difficult, influential, and fascinating texts.

## COURSE FORMAT

### Learning Objectives/ Goals

- Understand core ideas in theories of culture and society
- Communicate in both writing and speech about anthropological theory
- Apply perspectives in theories of culture and society to real-world contexts.
- Identify and analyze key challenges and complexities related to addressing specific problems in social theory
- Analyze and explain different approaches to the study of culture and society
- Write, speak, communicate, and think more critically and clearly about the world around you

### Course Engagement

This writing intensive course combines lectures, in-class presentations, and small group work. We will cover a range of different materials in a number of different ways. I expect full, active, and professional participation in class. This means:

- . Attending all class meetings
- . Showing up on time (note—persistently showing up late will negatively affect your participation grade)
- . Respectfully engaging with the course instructor, TA, and your peers
- . Being responsible for all of the assigned reading and materials: if you miss a class, it is your responsibility to do the reading and get class notes from one of your peers
- . Actively participating in peer review sessions

### Course structure

The course will be broken down into three different kinds of classes

- **Lectures:** These sessions will primarily be composed of a lecture delivered by the course instructor. For each lecture, a set of reading questions will be delivered in advance that will be asked during the course of the lecture. Students will come to lecture prepared to respond to these questions (students will be called on at regular intervals to answer them). You do not have to demonstrate full mastery of these texts in your responses, but your answers should demonstrate a good-faith engagement with course materials.
- **Theory Labs:** These sessions will primarily be composed of in-class activities where students will work in small groups or participate in larger group discussions. Such activities might include things such as working to collectively apply a set of course ideas to a real-world case, reverse outlining a challenging reading, working through a set of questions, etc.
- **Split Discussions:** In these classes, two articles are assigned. Half the class will read one of these articles, the other half the other. During the first 50 minutes of class, students will work with others who have read the piece to a) come to some consensus as to the meaning of the piece and b) come up with a plan to teach that article to half of the class that has *not* read the piece. In the last 30 minutes of the class, we will reconvene, and each group will teach the other group their respective articles.

### Assignments & Grades

1. As noted above, students will be responsible for preparing for and answering questions about readings for lecture sessions (in class).

2. Over the course of the class, each student will write five brief memos on a class or specific reading of their choosing. The structure of these memos will be discussed in class. Each will be approximately 300 words in length.
3. There will be three additional essays. The first two of these will be peer-reviewed and revised based on peer feedback. These essays are as follows:

*Essay #1—Choose one of the following brief essays. Use the readings we have discussed in class during this unit to write a 600–800-word essay outlining the author’s theory of historical change and approach to exploring it.*

- E.P. Thompson. 1968. “Preface.” *The Making of the English Working Class*. Penguin Books.
- Ranajit Guha. “On Some Aspects of Historiography in Colonial India.” In *Subaltern Studies*, Vol. 1. Oxford University Press.

*Essay #2: Watch the film The Act of Killing. Write an essay that illuminates some aspect of the film by drawing on one of the following thinkers: Durkheim, Mauss, Douglas, Turner, Foucault, or Butler. Due March 13. 800-1000 words.*

*Essay #3: Choose a theme (for example, class, power, gender, etc.) that you feel cuts across multiple thinkers and topics we have covered in the course. Identify this theme and tell us why it is important (i.e., how it bears on the theories of culture and society at large that we have explored in this course). Choose two authors who engage with this theme and put their arguments in dialogue with each other. You might compare and contrast their views, juxtapose them, or synthesize them; it’s up to you. But your essay should make an argument about the theme you choose and convince us of the validity of your argument. 800-1000 words.*

**Grade Breakdown:**

- Responses to reading questions: 10%
- Participation: 10 %
- Five reading memos: 20%
- Essay 1: 20%
- Essay 2: 20%
- Essay 3: 20%

**Grade Cutoffs**

A	94%
A-	90%
B+	87%
B	84%
B-	80%
C+	77%
C	74%
C-	70%
D	65%
F	<65%

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

**Week 1: Theory, Thick and Thin**

*January 14: Lecture—Course Introduction*

*January 16: Theory Lab*

Readings:

- Clifford Geertz. 1973. “Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture.” In *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books.

- James Clifford. 1986. "Partial Truths." In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. University of California Press.

## **Week 2: Class and Value**

### *January 21: Lecture*

#### Readings:

- Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, "Base and Superstructure." Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto The Marx-Engels Reader* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), edited by Robert Tucker, 473-83. New York: Norton, 1978.
- Karl Marx. *Capital, Vol. 1*. "The Fetishism of Commodities and its Secrets"

### *January 23: Split Discussion*

#### Readings (half the class will read one essay, the other half the other):

- Michael Taussig. 1980. "The Devil and Commodity Fetishism." In *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*.
- Jean and John Comaroff. 2002. "Alien-Nation: Zombies, Immigrants, and Millennial Capitalism." *South Atlantic Quarterly*. 101 (4).

## **Week 3: Domination and Consent**

### *January 28: Lecture*

#### Readings:

- Raymond Williams. "Hegemony" in *Marxism and Literature*.
- Stuart Hall. "Domination and Hegemony." *Cultural Studies* 1983

### *January 30: Theory Lab*

#### Readings:

- William Rosebery. "Hegemony and the Language of Contention." In *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*.
- Choose the essay you will write about for Essay 1 and read it

*Essay #1—Choose one of the following brief essays. Use the readings we have discussed in class during this unit to write a 600–800-word essay outlining the author's theory of historical change and approach to exploring it.*

- E.P. Thompson. 1968. "Preface." *The Making of the English Working Class*. Penguin Books.
- Ranajit Guha. "On Some Aspects of Historiography in Colonial India." In *Subaltern Studies, Vol. 1*. Oxford University Press.

## **Week 4: Structure and Symbol**

### *February 4: Peer Review Session*

Submit a draft of your first essay by noon (before class)

Revised version of essay one due on Friday, February 7, by midnight

### *February 6: Lecture*

#### Readings:

- Emile Durkheim. Selections. *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.

## **Week 5: Structure and Symbol Continued**

### *February 11: Lecture*

#### Readings:

- Marcel Mauss. Selections. *The Gift*.

### *February 13: Lecture*

- Mary Douglas. *Purity and Danger*. Excerpts
- Turner, V. 1967. "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*." In *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Cornell University Press.

## **Week 6: Roots and Power**

### *February 18: Theory Lab*

- Liisa Malkki. "National Geographic: The Rooting of People and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees." *Cultural Anthropology*.

### *February 20: Lecture*

- Michel Foucault. 1977. "Panopticism." In *Discipline and Punish*." Vintage.
- Michel Foucault. 1978. "Method." In *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*. Vintage.

## **Week 7: Biopolitics**

### *February 25: Lecture*

#### Readings/Listening:

- Michel Foucault. 1978. "The Right of Death and the Power Over Life. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*. Vintage.
- Great Books Series Podcast with Uli Bear. "[Ann Stoler on Truth and Knowledge for Michel Foucault.](#)"

### *February 27: Split Discussion*

#### Readings (half the class will read one essay, the other half the other):

- Miriam Ticktin. 2006. "Where Ethics and Politics Meet: The Violence of Humanitarianism in France." *American Ethnologist*.
- Peter Redfield. 2005. "Doctors, Borders, and Life in Crisis." *Cultural Anthropology*. 20(3).

## **Week 8: Troubling Gender**

### *March 4: Lecture*

- Butler, J. "Subversive Bodily Acts." In *The Cultural Studies Reader*.
- [Sarah Ahmed. "White Men." feministkilljoys.com](#)

### *March 6: Theory Lab*

- Philip Bourgois. 1996. "In Search of Masculinity: Violence, Respect and Sexuality among Puerto Rican Crack Dealers in East Harlem." *The British Journal of Criminology*. 36(3).
- Evan Towle and Lynn Morgan. 2002. "Romancing the Transgender Native: Rethinking the Use of the 'Third Gender' Concepts." *GLQ*. 8:4.

## **Week 9: Reproduction, Social and Otherwise**

### *March 11: Lecture*

- Silvia Federici. "The Great Witch Hunt in Europe." In *Caliban and The Witch*

*Essay #2: Watch the film The Act of Killing. Write an essay that illuminates some aspect of the film by drawing on one of the following thinkers: Durkheim, Mauss, Douglas, Turner, Foucault, or Butler. Due March 25. 1000 words.*

*March 13: Theory Lab*

- Donna Haraway. 1991. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century. In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*. Routledge

### **Week 10: Acts of Revision**

*March 25: In-class peer review*

*March 27: No Class—working session*

*Final drafts of Paper 2 due Friday, March 28 by midnight.*

### **Week 11: Rethinking the Colonial Encounter**

*April 1: Lecture*

Readings:

- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness. In *Recapturing Anthropology*. Richard Fox, ed. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1991.
- Said, Edward. Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors. *Critical Inquiry* 15(2):205-225, 1989.

*April 3: Theory Lab*

Readings:

- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History. In *Provincializing Europe*. Princeton University Press.

### **Week 12: Towards a Postcolonial Feminism**

*April 8: Lecture*

- Chandra Talpade Mohanty. 1984. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse." *Boundary 2*. 12(3).

*April 10: Theory Lab*

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and its Others. *American Anthropologist* 104(3):783-790. 2002.

### **Week 13: Destabilizing Ethnographic Authority**

*April 15: Lecture*

- Donna Haraway. 1988. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies*.

*April 17: Theory Lab*

- Audra Simpson. "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice' and Colonial Citizenship."



*Essay #3: Choose a theme that you feel cuts across multiple thinkers and topics we have covered in the course. Identify this theme and tell us why it is important (i.e., how it bears on the theories of culture and society at large that we have explored in this course). Choose two authors who engage with this theme and put their arguments in dialogue with each other. You might compare and contrast their views, juxtapose them, or synthesize them; it's up to you. But your essay should make an argument about the theme you choose and convince us of the validity of your argument. 1000-1500 words.*

#### **Week 14: Forwards/Backwards**

*April 22: Lecture*

- Zoe Todd. Indigenizing the Anthropocene.
- [Elizabeth Povinelli. 2011. "Routes/Worlds." \*E-Flux\*. 27](#)

*April 24: Course Conclusion*

Final Essay Due Monday, April 28 by Midnight

## **COURSE POLICIES**

### **Email and Office Hours policy**

- Please, feel free to contact me and/or your TA via email. I prefer that you contact me directly ([jasoncons@utexas.edu](mailto:jasoncons@utexas.edu)) rather than through Canvas. Please make sure you consult the course syllabus, other handouts, your peers, and the course Canvas site before sending an e-mail. We will endeavor to respond within 24 hours, though note that **we do not respond to email on the weekends or after 5pm**, so plan ahead.
- Contacting us the night before an assignment is due is, by definition, too late.
- My office hours are *your* time. That said, I ask that you schedule an appointment ahead of time. [You can do so through this link](#)
- If you have a regular class conflict during my office hours, I am more than happy to set up an appointment with you at another time.

### **Course readings and syllabus**

I believe that a course and its instructor should be adaptable. This means that readings and course activities may change to suite course developments, forward fruitful discussions, or to address student interests. For this reason, the readings in this syllabus should be regarded as provisional. For any given week, the readings will be available on Canvas.

While readings may, from time to time change, the course policies and procedures listed in this syllabus will not. It is your responsibility to know them.

### **Reading Policy**

All of the course readings for this class can be found on Canvas.

In some classes, we will spend significant time discussing particular readings. In others, we will treat them as background. In all cases, if there is something you don't understand in the material, it is your responsibility to make sure that you gain an understanding of it by asking questions and

raising issues. You are expected to arrive at class ready to discuss any and all of the required course readings.

### **Policy on Plagiarism**

I strongly believe that learning is a collaborative venture. I encourage you to study with your peers (safely and virtually), meet (again, virtually) to discuss readings with them, and, on particular assignments, to work together with them. That said, the work that you produce for this course must be your own. There are no exceptions to this rule and no legitimate excuses for violating it.

In event that you fail to acknowledge others' work or that you are caught overtly plagiarizing from online or written sources, you will receive a zero on the assignment and may be subject to disciplinary procedures. See below for the University Policy on Academic integrity.

### **Sharing of Course Materials is Prohibited**

No materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, lecture hand-outs, videos, assessments (quizzes, exams, papers, projects, homework assignments), in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets, may be shared online or with anyone outside of the class unless you have my explicit, written permission. Unauthorized sharing of materials promotes cheating. It is a violation of the University's Student Honor Code and an act of academic dishonesty. I am well aware of the sites used for sharing materials, and any materials found online that are associated with you, or any suspected unauthorized sharing of materials, will be reported to Student Conduct and Academic Integrity in the Office of the Dean of Students. These reports can result in sanctions, including failure in the course.

### **Class Recordings**

Class recordings are reserved only for students in this class for educational purposes and are protected under FERPA. The recordings should not be shared outside the class in any form. Violation of this restriction by a student could lead to Student Misconduct proceedings.

### **Late Policy**

I adhere to the following late policy on assignments:

- . Section assignments are before class the day of your section meeting. Late assignments are not accepted
- . Assignments turned in up to 12 hours late will be penalized by 1/3 of a letter grade.
- . Assignments turned in between 12 and 24 hours late will be penalized a full letter grade.
- . Assignments turned in between 24 and 48 hours late will be penalized two full letter grades.
- . Assignments more than 48 hours late will not be accepted.

### **Writing Policy**

This course carries the Writing Flag. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to revise one or more assignments, and you may be asked to read and discuss your peers' work. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from your written work. Writing Flag classes meet the Core Communications objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, and Personal Responsibility, established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.



I have also provided advice for student writers that is applicable not just in my courses, but in any course you are likely to take as an undergraduate:

<http://www.jasoncons.net/advice-on-writing.html>

### **Attendance Policy**

Attendance at all course and section meetings is required. There will be an attendance sheet available when you come into class.

You are permitted two unexplained course absences per semester. After that, each absence will reduce your overall participation grade by 3.33% (i.e., by 1/3 of a letter grade). If you have a legitimate reason to miss class, it is your responsibility to let me and your TA know by email before class.

### **Statement on Learning Success**

Your success in this class is important to me. We will all need accommodations because we all learn differently. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know as soon as possible. We will develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. I also encourage you to reach out to the student resources available through UT. Many are listed on this syllabus, but I am happy to connect you with a person or Center if you would like.

### **Student Rights & Responsibilities**

- You have a right to a learning environment that supports mental and physical wellness.
- You have a right to respect.
- You have a right to be assessed and graded fairly.
- You have a right to freedom of opinion and expression.
- You have a right to privacy and confidentiality.
- You have a right to meaningful and equal participation, to self-organize groups to improve your learning environment.
- You have a right to learn in an environment that is welcoming to all people. No student shall be isolated, excluded or diminished in any way.

With these rights come responsibilities:

- You are responsible for taking care of yourself, managing your time, and communicating with the teaching team and with others if things start to feel out of control or overwhelming.
- You are responsible for acting in a way that is worthy of respect and always respectful of others.
- Your experience with this course is directly related to the quality of the energy that you bring to it, and your energy shapes the quality of your peers' experiences.
- You are responsible for creating an inclusive environment and for speaking up when someone is excluded.
- You are responsible for holding yourself accountable to these standards, holding each other to these standards, and holding the teaching team accountable as well.

### **Personal Pronoun Preference**

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender

variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by a name different than what appears on the roster, and by the gender pronouns you use. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

I use the pronouns: he, him, his. Also, feel free to address me either as Professor Cons or Dr. Cons as you wish. Please don't call me Mr. Cons (that doctorate was a lot of work, folks!).

### **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**

[Texas Senate Bill 17](#), the recent law that outlaws diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at public colleges and universities in Texas, does not in any way affect content, instruction or discussion in a course at public colleges and universities in Texas. Expectations and academic freedom for teaching and class discussion have not been altered post-SB 17, and students should not feel the need to censor their speech pertaining to topics including race and racism, structural inequality, LGBTQ+ issues, or diversity, equity, and inclusion.

## **UNIVERSITY POLICIES & RESOURCES**

### **Religious Holy Days**

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, I will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

### **Q Drop Policy**

If you want to drop a class after the 12th class day, you'll need to execute a Q drop before the Q-drop deadline, which typically occurs near the middle of the semester. Under Texas law, you are only allowed six Q drops while you are in college at any public Texas institution. For more information, see: <http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/csacc/academic/adddrop/qdrop>

### **Student Accommodations**

Students with a documented disability may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone). <http://ddce.utexas.edu/disability/about/>

- Please request a meeting as soon as possible to discuss any accommodations
- Please notify me as soon as possible if the material being presented in class is not accessible
- Please notify me if any of the physical space is difficult for you

### **Academic Integrity**

Each student in the course is expected to abide by the University of Texas Honor Code:

“As a student of The University of Texas at Austin, I shall abide by the core values of the University and uphold academic integrity.”

This means that work you produce on assignments, tests and exams is all your own work, unless it is assigned as group work. I will make it clear for each test, exam or assignment whether collaboration is encouraged or not.

Always cite your sources. If you use words or ideas that are not your own (or that you have used in previous class), you must make that clear otherwise you will be guilty of plagiarism and subject to academic disciplinary action, including failure of the course.

You are responsible for understanding UT's Academic Honesty Policy which can be found at the following web address: [http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint\\_student.php](http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php)

### **University Resources for Students**

The university has numerous resources for students to provide assistance and support for your learning, use these to help you succeed in your classes

#### **The Sanger Learning Center**

Did you know that more than one-third of UT undergraduate students use the Sanger Learning Center each year to improve their academic performance? All students are welcome to take advantage of Sanger Center's classes and workshops, private learning specialist appointments, peer academic coaching, and tutoring for more than 70 courses in 15 different subject areas. For more information, please visit <http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/slc> or call 512-471-3614 (JES A332).

#### **The University Writing Center**

The University Writing Center offers free, individualized, expert help with writing for any UT student, by appointment or on a drop-in basis. Consultants help students develop strategies to improve their writing. The assistance we provide is intended to foster students' resourcefulness and self-reliance. <http://uwc.utexas.edu/>

#### **Counseling and Mental Health Center**

The Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC) provides counseling, psychiatric, consultation, and prevention services that facilitate students' academic and life goals and enhance their personal growth and well-being. <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/>

#### **Student Emergency Services**

<http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/>

#### **ITS**

Need help with technology? <http://www.utexas.edu/its/>

#### **Libraries**

Need help searching for information? <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/>

#### **Canvas**

Canvas help is available 24/7 at <https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/633028/pages/student-tutorials>

### **Important Safety Information**

#### **BCAL**

If you have concerns about the safety or behavior of fellow students, TAs or Professors, call BCAL (the Behavior Concerns Advice Line): 512-232-5050. Your call can be anonymous. If something doesn't feel right – it probably isn't. Trust your instincts and share your concerns.

**Evacuation Information**

The following recommendations regarding emergency evacuation from the Office of Campus Safety and Security, 512-471-5767, <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/>

Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when an alarm or alert is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside, unless told otherwise by an official representative.

Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy.

Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.

Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class.

In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: Austin Fire Department, The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.

Link to information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at: [www.utexas.edu/emergency](http://www.utexas.edu/emergency)